

Sport Hunting
Decision Document Package
for
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

Contents

1. Hunting Plan
2. EA

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for
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

Draft

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1. Sport Hunting Plan

SPORT HUNTING PLAN

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

ST MARKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

NOVEMBER 2012

Recommended by _____ Date: _____
Refuge Manager

Reviewed by _____ Date: _____
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I. INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge (SMNWR) to guide refuge management and resource conservation over the next 15 years. This plan serves as a Step-down Management Plan for Sport Hunting on SMNWR. Sport hunting has been conducted on SMNWR since 1978. It is currently conducted under the plan approved in 1983.

SMNWR came into existence in 1931, with the primary objective being migratory waterfowl management. The refuge has since grown to approximately 70,000 acres. An acquisition history can be found in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan Chapter 2.

For administrative purposes SMNWR is divided into three distinct management units: the St. Marks, the Wakulla, and the Panacea. These three units occupy some 40 miles of coastline located from the Aucilla River west to the Ochlockonee River. Portions of all three units are open to hunting.

II. CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITY

Under Executive Order 5740, dated October 31, 1931, which established the refuge from lands within the public domain, the purpose of the acquisition was A...as a refuge and breeding ground for wild animals and birds. Subsequent acquisitions were made under a variety of authorities. For lands acquired under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929 (16 U.S.C., Section 715d), the purpose of the acquisition was "...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." For lands acquired under the Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 U.S.C., Section 460k-1), the purpose of the acquisition was "...for (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development; (2) the protection of natural resources; and (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species." Under the National Wildlife System Administration Act (NWRSA), refuges were established for "conservation, management, and restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans (16 U.S.C. 668dd(a)(2). The Wilderness Act of 1964, Public Law 92-363, dated January 3, 1975, also designated "...certain lands in the St. Marks Wildlife Refuge, Florida which comprise approximately seventeen thousand seven hundred and forty-six acres...as the St. Marks Wilderness." These purposes and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System as defined by the NWRSA and the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement act of 1977 (Improvement Act) are fundamental to determining the compatibility of proposed uses of the refuge.

The CCP supports the priority public use provisions of the Improvement Act. Hunting as specified in this plan is a wildlife-dependent recreational use and the law states that as

such, it “shall receive priority consideration in national wildlife refuge planning and management.” The Secretary of Interior may permit hunting on a refuge if he/she determines that such use is compatible with the refuge purpose for which it was established. The hunting program would not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the purposes of the Refuge or mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (603 FW).

Public hunting on St Marks NWR is an appropriate and compatible form of wildlife oriented public recreation which is compatible with the purpose for which the refuge was established. With adoption of the CCP in 2006, the refuge has a compatibility determination for hunting, which is proposed to be revised with the passage of this plan. Hunting properly applied as a management tool inhibits the overpopulation of species within a given habitat community and can provide for greater wildlife diversity. In this way the environment is preserved for the benefit of a variety of wildlife. The hunting program is designed to minimize potential conflicts with Refuge purposes. Hunting of big game (whitetail deer, turkey, feral hogs), small game (gray squirrels, rabbits, and raccoons), and migratory birds (ducks and coots) are permitted except within designated closed areas.

Hunt administration for the 2011-2012 season, including salary, equipment, waterfowl boundary, sign maintenance, fuel, etc. totaled \$ 47,900. Less than one full time employee equivalent is expended in conducting hunt-related activities. Funds are available to meet the conditions set forth in the Refuge Recreation Act. It is anticipated that funding would continue to be sufficient to continue the hunting program in the future. Hunters purchase permits for the privilege of hunting on the refuge. The funds collected are used to help pay for hunt administration and management. In summary, funds are available to continue the existing and proposed hunt program, and proposed hunting activities should not interfere with the primary purposes for which the refuge was established.

III. STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

Current major refuge objectives are (1) conserve, restore, and enhance a natural diversity and abundance of habitats for native plants and animals, (2) conserve and enhance populations of threatened, endangered, rare, and imperiled plants and animals and their native habitats, (3) provide high-quality habitat for migratory birds (4) promote an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife resources and provide visitors with a quality, safe, and an enjoyable experience compatible with wildlife and wildland conservation, (5) protect archaeological, cultural, and historic resources for future generations as examples of human interaction with the natural environment, (6) protect and preserve the wilderness character of those refuge lands designated by Congress as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, and (7) provide administrative support and sufficient resources to ensure that the goals and objectives for refuge habitats, fish and wildlife populations, land conservation, and visitor services are achieved.

Hunting and fishing are integral parts of Florida culture. It is not surprising that there is

considerable state and local interest in expanding hunting opportunities. Any additional hunting opportunities will depend on whether the refuge can provide safe, quality experiences that are compatible with refuge purposes. Hunting on newly acquired lands will be conducted in accordance with refuge purposes reflected in the authorizing legislation and Refuge System policy. If lands within the current refuge acquisition boundary are acquired, the number of hunting opportunities and hunting visits could be increased. Hunting seasons will be set in close coordination with the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The objectives of the refuge hunt program are as follows:

- 1) To provide opportunities for high quality hunting experiences on current and future refuge lands.
- 2) To maintain the deer populations at levels compatible with seasonal habitat carrying capacities.
- 3) To allow compatible public use of a valuable renewable resource on current and future refuge lands.
- 4) To reduce feral hog populations.

Conducting a well-managed hunt program on SMNWR has in the past and would continue to assist the refuge in meeting one of its primary objectives, which is to provide the general public with quality wildlife-oriented recreational programs that are compatible with the purposes for which it was established.

Refer to Decision Document Package, Environmental Assessment for additional information.

IV. ASSESSMENT

1. Compatibility with Refuge Objectives

Hunting is one of the six wildlife-oriented recreational uses prioritized by the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997. The Secretary of Interior may permit hunting on a refuge if he/she determines that such use is compatible with the refuge purpose for which it was established. The hunting program will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the purposes of the Refuge or mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (603 FW).

2. Biological Soundness

Deer

Deer hunts have proven to be not only compatible with refuge objectives but also

beneficial in meeting them. Deer harvest is essential to maintain the herd at or below habitat carrying capacity. When deer are overpopulated, they over browse their habitat, which can completely change the plant composition of a forest. Overpopulation can also lead to outbreaks of devastating diseases such as Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease and bluetongue. Overpopulation also leads to increased car-deer collisions and poor overall herd health. The expansion of hunting on additional refuge lands should not negatively impact the deer herd. In fact, virtually all of the new refuge lands that will be opened to hunting have a recent history of hunting on them. Expansion of deer hunting will be coordinated with Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission to ensure that the hunt is compatible with their “Strategic Plan for Deer Management in Florida 2008-2018.”

Feral Hogs

Feral hogs are an extremely invasive introduced non-native species. They can harbor several infectious diseases, some of which can be transmissible to humans and some of which can be fatal to wildlife. By rooting and wallowing, feral hogs destroy wildlife habitat. Damage includes erosion along waterways and wetlands and the loss of native plants. Additionally, feral hogs compete directly for food with deer, bears, turkeys, squirrels and many other birds and mammals. They are predators of small mammals and deer fawns as well as eggs of ground-nesting birds such as turkeys. They also prey on other ground dwelling reptiles and amphibians and likely adversely affect the endangered frosted flatwoods salamander found here at SMNWR. Complete eradication of feral hog is desirable, but currently is not feasible. Hunting of feral hogs provides the refuge with another management tool in reducing this detrimental species, and at the same time, is widely enjoyed by local hunters.

Wild Turkey

Wild Turkey in Florida are managed under the guidance of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Wild Turkey Management Program (WTMP). The WTMP is charged with coordinating wild turkey management and research activities across the state and providing a statewide approach to conservation and management of Florida’s wild turkey population. As a part of the 10 year strategic plan (2008-2018) the following goal was developed ; “Ensure healthy an sustainable wild turkey populations throughout the state while providing and promoting compatible uses of the resource (FWCC 2008)” In fact, funds provided through the State sale of turkey stamps are used to fund biologists and research projects to increase knowledge and to improve turkey management in the State. The refuge will coordinate with the State of Florida to ensure that our turkey hunts are within their management guidelines.

Migratory Birds

Migratory birds are a primary reason the refuge was established currently the majority of the waterfowl habitat on the refuge is closed to waterfowl hunting, providing ducks and geese with ample sanctuary. To accommodate demand for a traditional form of recreation, we allow hunting of some common species, ducks and coots, on Piney Island

in the Panacea Unit. No other migratory bird species are hunted.

The principal fresh water habitat for waterfowl at St. Marks NWR exists in six impoundments totaling about 1300 acres. These impoundments are immediately adjacent to Lighthouse Road and the Florida National Scenic Trail traverses the levees passing through and adjacent them. Because of the physical position of the impoundments hunting cannot be accommodated safely and without severe conflicts with other priority uses (wildlife observation, wildlife photography). A 33,000 acre Executive Closure area in Apalachee Bay, established to provide sanctuary to a significant portion of the continental redhead duck population and the impoundments of the St. Marks Unit are closed to waterfowl hunting. These areas contain the largest concentrations of waterfowl on the refuge. Where large concentrations of waterfowl exist in the St. Marks Unit, we close the adjoining levees to all public use to minimize disturbance.

Small Game (Gray Squirrel, Rabbit, Raccoon)

Studies examining the effects of hunting on the population dynamics of small game have consistently shown that cottontail rabbit and gray squirrel populations are not affected by hunting, but rather are limited by food resources. Gray squirrels, Eastern cottontails, and marsh rabbits are prolific breeders and their populations have never been threatened by hunting in Florida even prior to the passing of modern hunting regulations. We currently offer a two week small game hunt on all areas of the refuge open to hunting.

3. Economic Feasibility

Annual hunt administration costs including salary, equipment, waterfowl boundary, sign maintenance, fuel, etc. totaled \$47,900. Less than one full-time-employee equivalent is expended on hunt-related activities. Funds are available to meet the conditions set forth in the Refuge Recreation Act. We anticipate that funding would continue to be sufficient to continue the hunting program in the future. Currently, hunters purchase permits for the quota hunting on the refuge. The funds collected are used to help pay for hunt administration and management. In summary, funds are available to continue the existing and proposed hunt program, and proposed hunting activities should not interfere with the primary purposes for which the refuge was established. The quota hunt process would be extended to the new lands opened to hunting.

4. Relationship with other Refuge Programs

None of the proposed hunts offer major conflicts with with non-consumptive users. There are minor conflicts with hunting and hikers on the Florida National Scenic Trail. These were mitigated by not allowing hunting in two tracts purchased for trail purposes by the National Forest Service. Big game and small game hunting is allowed during a limited duration (approximately 35 days in 2011). The opening of a new area to a youth hunting program would extend the season, but would be conducted in an area with limited public use. The area around the Lighthouse Road south of the Visitor Center in the St. Marks Unit is closed to hunting to minimize conflict with other priority public uses.

Portions of the hunt area may temporarily be closed due to wildlife management practices such as prescribed burns, wiregrass seed collection, and forest management practices.

5. Recreational Opportunity

Hunting in the state of Florida is a long standing traditional activity. We propose to continue hunting at the current level and in current areas and to increase hunting by opening areas of the St. Marks Unit and new acquisitions to hunting of white-tailed deer, turkey, feral pig, gray squirrel, rabbit, and raccoons. Additionally, a youth hunt will be conducted on a portion of the St. Marks Unit. The youth hunt supports the refuge's education program and Connecting Youth with Nature initiative and would implement a strategy laid out in Goal4. Objective 3, of the CCP (USFWS 2006).

V. DESCRIPTION OF HUNTING PROGRAM

Deer, feral hog and turkey, big game, hunting are allowed on the Wakulla and Panacea Units. The seasons are limited and currently consist of one archery and one gun hunt per area. Any increase in seasons will have to be balanced against the increased cost of administering the hunt. All hunters are required to have a permit. The hunts are currently operated as quota hunts and the permits are selected through the State of Florida Licensing program.

Gray squirrel, feral hog, rabbit, and raccoon, small game, hunting is allowed on the Wakulla Unit, Panacea Unit, and the Aucilla River portion of the St. Marks Unit. The hunt is currently limited to two weeks. Permits are required, but this is not a quota hunt. Permits are issued at the refuge office or can be picked up at the check stations.

Spring turkey hunting is allowed on the Wakulla and Panacea Units. We conduct one turkey hunt during the spring state season. The hunt dates are limited and permits are required. The hunt is currently operated as a quota hunt and the permits are selected by the State of Florida.

We propose to open additional lands in the St. Marks Unit to limited hunting. The lands may be open to deer, turkey, feral hog and small game hunting. The additional lands opened may include lands east of the St. Marks River, South of U.S. Highway 98, and north of Aucilla Tram Road. This may include any lands purchased in the current acquisition boundary. Most of these lands were historically hunted as part of the state wildlife management system. We are proposing to re-open the lands to hunting. Hunt length and season will be determined by the need for animal control and by costs of administering the hunts.

Annual consultation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission will continue. Our hunting seasons are more restrictive than state regulations. The hunts are scheduled to fall within the state season. If we plan to hold a deer hunt outside of the state season, the dates are coordinated with the State. Consultation with the State will

include ensuring that the hunts are in compliance with the State Strategic Plans for white-tailed deer and turkey.

Enforcement of hunt regulations would primarily be carried out by refuge officers. Currently, hunters are required to check their game through self-administered check stations on the archery, turkey and small game hunts. We operate check stations for the gun hunts using a mix of staff and volunteers. The main function of the deer check station is to collect biological data from the deer to determine herd health. Cost for salaries, materials and equipment upkeep would be approximately \$47,900 annually.

A summary of the current hunts and the proposed hunts are as follows:

Hunting is currently conducted in the Wakulla and Panacea units of the refuge in the following manner:

- One five day archery hunt is conducted for white-tailed deer and feral hog in each unit on different dates.
- One three day modern gun hunt is conducted for white-tailed deer and feral hog in each unit on different dates.
- One two week small game season is conducted for feral hog, gray squirrel, rabbit and raccoon in each unit concurrently in both units.
- One five day spring turkey hunt conducted concurrently in both units.
- One three day mobility impaired hunter opportunity conducted in one unit.

Hunting in the St. Marks Unit is currently conducted in the following manner:

- One youth deer hunt in the Port Leon area of the St. Marks Unit. This hunt is being conducted in partnership with the education division of the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- There is a small game hunt conducted in the Aucilla portion of the St. Marks Unit conducted concurrently with the hunts in the Panacea and Wakulla Units.

We propose to open additional lands in the St. Marks Unit that are currently within our acquisition boundary and are being acquired in phases. The following areas are proposed to be opened to hunting (see Appendix 2):

- Area A: Lands in the approved acquisition boundary that are adjacent to the Wakulla or Panacea Unit.
- Area B: The Port Leon Portion of the St. Marks Unit including portions of the wilderness area.
- Area C: The area south of Highway 98, east of Lighthouse Road and north of the Tram Road (Refuge Road 105)

The proposed hunts for each area will be:

- Area A: These lands would be included in the current Wakulla and Panacea hunt units. The hunts on these lands would be the same as the No Action alternative listed above.
- Area B: In addition to the youth deer hunt, we propose to open a youth spring turkey hunt. These hunts would initially be conducted in partnership with the education division of FWC. St. Marks may continue these hunts even if FWC is not a partner. We also propose allowing archery hunting for white-tailed deer and feral hog, gun hunting of white-tailed deer and feral hog, small game hunting for gray squirrel, raccoon, and rabbit, and spring turkey hunting. Season length and bag limits will be evaluated and adjusted annually based on harvest needs and refuge funding.
- Area C: As lands are purchased in these two areas, we also allow archery hunting for white-tailed deer and feral hog, gun hunting of white-tailed deer and feral hog, small game hunting for gray squirrel, raccoon, and rabbit, and spring turkey hunting. Season length and bag limits will be evaluated and adjusted annually based on harvest needs and refuge funding.

Every effort will be made to coordinate all hunting seasons with FWC. On lands adjacent to active FWC Wildlife Management Areas, partnerships will be considered to allow St. Marks Lands to be hunted as a part of the Wildlife Management Area.

Specific hunting regulations are printed in brochure form and posted annually with the current season dates, bag limits, and closed areas. Season length and bag limit are adjusted annually based on harvest needs and refuge funding availability. The 2012 Brochure contains specific information for the current St. Marks Refuge Hunting Program. (Appendix 1)

The St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge currently offers quota hunts for White-tailed Deer and Eastern Wild Turkey. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) is currently handling all quota permitting through local tax collectors offices and web-based programs. According to FWCC data, and our biological and public use data, St. Marks NWR conventional gun quota hunts rival the top public hunts in the state with over 5 percent success rate. We currently offer 230 slots for conventional weapons, 400 slots for archery, and 15 slots for Mobility Impaired hunters. We offer 100 slots for Spring Gobbler Turkey season. Small game permits, that also permit take of feral hogs, are available as non-quota permit

VI. MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

A. Biological Conflicts

Refer to the Decision Document Package, Section 7 Evaluation.

There has been no indication of adverse biological impacts associated with the refuge's hunting program. However, should it become necessary, the refuge has the latitude to adjust hunting seasons and bag limits annually, or to close the refuge entirely if there are safety issues or other concerns that merit closure. This latitude, coupled with monitoring of wildlife populations and habitat conditions by the Service and the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission, will ensure that long-term negative impacts to either wildlife populations and/or habitats on the refuge are unlikely.

Safeguards are, and will continue to be, employed to provide special protection to threatened and endangered species or other animals that could be negatively impacted by hunting. All eagle nests are protected from hunting disturbance by closing wide buffers for example.

B. Public Use Conflicts

Hunting has been conducted on St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge since 1978. Most of the non-hunting public use on the refuge occurs on the St. Marks Unit along Lighthouse Road. The portion of Lighthouse Road south of the Visitor Center is planned to remain closed to hunting. Hunts on the refuge are conducted for a limited number of days within the State Season. While other public uses can and do occur in the hunt zones during hunts, most of our visitors plan their activities in the hunt zone to occur outside of the scheduled hunts. The Florida National Scenic Trail traverses the hunt area. There are tracts within the hunting zone that were purchased by Forest Service for the Florida National Scenic Trail that are closed to hunting to allow for through hikers to camp at designated sites during the hunts.

C. Administrative Conflicts

The manpower and funding available to administer this hunt are adequate with current assets. Presently, little labor intensive data is collected during the hunts. A staggered tour of duty by law enforcement personnel and refuge staff minimizes manpower costs.

VII. CONDUCT OF THE HUNTING PROGRAM

A. Refuge-specific hunting regulations

ST. MARKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

- A. Migratory Game Bird Hunting. We allow hunting of duck and coot on designated areas of the refuge in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:
 - 1. Hunters must remove blinds daily (see 27.93 of this chapter).
 - 2. We allow retriever dogs to recover game.
 - 3. We prohibit migratory game bird hunting in the Executive Closure Area on the refuge.

4. Hunters may access the hunt area by boat.

B. Upland Game Hunting. We allow hunting of gray squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, and feral hog in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. We require refuge permits for hunting upland game. Permits are available at no cost from the refuge office. Each hunter must possess and carry a signed permit while participating in a hunt.
2. All visitors must wear 500 square inches (3,250 cm²) of fluorescent orange above the waistline while in a designated hunting unit during a refuge hunt.
3. Hunters may use .22 caliber or smaller rim-fire rifles, shotguns, with nontoxic shot (#4 bird shot or smaller)(see 32.2(k)), or muzzleloaders to harvest squirrel, rabbit, and raccoon. In addition, shotgun slugs, buckshot, or archery equipment, or pistols may be used to take feral hogs. We prohibit the use of other weapons.
4. Leashed dogs can be used for trailing injured or harvested game. Unleashed dogs are prohibited.
5. There is no limit on the size or number of feral hogs that hunters may take.
6. We allow hunting on designated areas of the refuge. Contact the refuge office for specific dates.
7. We prohibit hunting from any named or numbered road (with the exception of persons hunting during the mobility impaired hunt).
8. We prohibit cleaning of game within 1,000 feet (390 m) of any residence, developed public recreation area, or game check station.
9. All game harvested must be checked out at a game check station.
10. We prohibit the use of flagging, paint, blazes, or reflective trail markers.
11. Vehicle access is limited to permitted hunters during the hunts.

C. Big Game Hunting. We allow hunting of white-tailed deer, feral hog, and turkey in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. We require refuge permits. There is a fee for permits. Permits are non-transferrable. There is an additional fee for duplicate permits. Each hunter must possess and carry a signed permit when participating in a hunt. Prior to hunting each day, you must check in at a hunt check station as specified in the refuge hunt brochure. You must check out upon completion of hunting each day.
2. Conditions B2, B4 through B11 apply.
3. You may access the refuge hunt areas by vehicle for pre-hunt scouting 2 days prior to the hunt for which you are drawn. (lottery administered by the State)
4. There is a two-deer limit per hunt as specified in C8 below, except in the youth hunt, where the limit is one deer per hunt as specified in C9 below. The limit for turkey is one per hunt. There is no limit on feral hog.
5. We prohibit the use of deer decoys.
6. There are two fall archery hunts: Hunters may harvest either-sex deer, feral hog, and either sex turkey during the fall archery hunts. There will be a fall archery hunt on the Panacea and Wakulla Units.
7. There are two modern gun hunts. Hunters may harvest deer, feral hog, and bearded turkey. Modern guns must meet State requirements. We will hold one

- hunt on the Panacea Unit and one hunt on the Wakulla Unit. See condition C8 for game limits. Contact the refuge office for specific dates.
8. The bag limit for white-tailed deer is two deer per scheduled hunt period. We allow hunters to harvest two antlerless deer per scheduled hunt period (we define antlerless deer un-antlered deer or deer with antlers less than 5"). Hunters may harvest one antlerless deer and one antlered deer per hunt. Hunters must ensure that antlered deer have at least 3 points, 1 inch (2.5 cm) or greater in length on one antler to be harvested. There is no limit on feral hogs.
 9. There is one youth hunt, for youth ages 12 to 17, on the St. Marks Unit in an area to be specified in the refuge hunt brochure. Hunters may harvest one deer of either sex or feral hog (no limit). An adult, age 21 or older possessing a refuge permit must accompany each youth hunter, and each adult may accompany only one youth. Only the youth hunter may handle or discharge firearms. Contact the refuge office for specific dates.
 10. There is one mobility-impaired hunt. Hunters may have an assistant accompany them. You may transfer permits issued to assistants. We limit those hunt teams to harvesting white-tailed deer and feral hogs within the limits described in condition C8. Contact the refuge office for specific dates
 11. There is one spring gobbler turkey hunt. You may harvest one bearded turkey per hunt. You may only use shotguns or archery equipment to harvest turkey. Contact the refuge office for specific dates. We prohibit hunting after 1 p.m.

Specific refuge regulations are revisited each year and revised in the fall. Regulations are revised based on the results of the previous season. Bag limits and season are subject to change based on harvest needs and refuge funding.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunt

The public has generally supported the refuge hunting program with exceptions usually being a demand for more hunting, more access and longer seasons. Public reaction from surrounding communities to all refuge hunts has been very favorable and should continue to be the same in the future. One strong public negative comment received during our public comment period for our current Land Protection Proposal came from hunters. They were concerned that the land included in the proposal would be removed from hunting if purchased by SMNWR.

C. Hunter Application Procedures

The St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is currently partnering with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to issue quota hunt permits. We anticipate continuing this partnership in the future. Prospective hunters must apply at a Tax Collectors office or sub-agent, or online at the FWCC official website. An application fee is assessed at the time of application and hunters may check their status after the given selection date.

D. Description of Hunter Selection Process

The hunters are selected by a computer drawing conducted by FWC. The selected hunter must pay the permit fee to receive the St. Marks NWR quota hunt permit. This permit is non-transferrable and identifies the specific hunt and hunt dates. If permits remain after the selected hunters purchase their permits, they are sold on a first come first serve basis until sold out.

E. Media Selection for Publicizing the Hunt

A news release is sent to the local newspapers and posted on the refuge website each spring, for the early summer application process. Demand regularly exceeds supply for the popular quota hunt permits.

F. Description of Hunter Orientation

The current refuge specific hunting regulations are currently mailed to the hunters and may be emailed in the future. These regulations are printed each summer and are available for pick up at the visitor center. The regulations may also be printed from the refuge website.

G. Hunter Requirements

(1) Age: Region 4 policy is adopted. In summary, all youth must be closely supervised (in sight and in normal voice contact) by an adult at least 21 years old. An adult may supervise only one youth on a big game hunt and no more than two youths old on a small game or waterfowl hunt. The definition of youth hunters on the refuge is as follows: under age 18 for all hunting except migratory bird hunts where youth are under 16 years of age.

(2) Allowable equipment: Hunter stands have to be removed by the end of each hunt. Blinds and decoys used for waterfowl hunting must be removed at the end of each day. Vehicles are restricted to designated public use roads. Firearm ammunition larger than .22 caliber rimfire, shotgun slugs or shells with shot larger than no. 2 shot are allowed only during the refuge gun deer season. Toxic shot is prohibited.

(3) All hunters must wear 3,250 square centimeters of hunter orange as an outside garment above the waist during the gun deer hunt.

(4) Use of open fires: Open fires are not allowed.

(5) License and permits: Hunting permit on annual public use regulations brochure required. The license requirements are those required by the State of Florida and the federal duck stamp.

(6) Youth hunters in the youth only hunt will be 12 to 17 years old and will be required to be accompanied by an adult 21 years of age or older.

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Appendix 1: 2012-2013 Hunt Brochure

General Provisions

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 500 national wildlife refuges. The primary objective of the refuge is to provide habitat for conservation and protection of all species of wildlife. The harvest of surplus animals is one tool used to maintain wildlife populations at a level compatible with habitat.

The regulations listed below supplement the general regulations which govern hunting on wildlife refuge as set forth in Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations. Hunting will be in accordance with applicable state regulations. For all hunts except small game, weapon restrictions are in accordance with State regulations.

Specific Hunting Regulations

All game must be checked out at designated check stations.

Public hunting is permitted on approximately 32,000 acres as shown on this map.

All hunters must possess identification, a Florida hunting license, and a valid refuge hunt permit for the hunt in which they are participating. State Management Area stamps are not required. A state archery stamp will be required for all archery hunts. A turkey stamp is required to hunt turkey. State and Federal waterfowl stamps are required to hunt waterfowl. State deer permit required for all refuge deer hunters.

Foot/vehicle access into the refuge hunt area will be through designated access points (see map). No parking along portions of public roads (see map). Vehicular access shown on map may vary according to weather and ground conditions. Vehicles are restricted to established roads. Boat access not permitted except to Piney Island for waterfowl hunting.

Pre-hunt scouting on foot is allowed anytime during daylight hours. The hunt area will be open to vehicles, weather permitting, two days before each quota hunt. Vehicle access in hunt area by permitted hunters only. Portions of the hunt area may be temporarily closed due to wildlife management practices such as prescribed burns.

All hunters participating in the small game/hog hunt and December quail gun hunts and other hunts in the hunt area, must wear a minimum of 500 square inches of fluorescent orange-colored material above the waistline. All other hunters are encouraged to wear orange for their safety.

Stand hours from 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1 1/2 hours after sunrise are observed during big game hunts as a hunter courtesy.

During all hunts for hogs, there are no restrictions on the size or number taken.

Youth hunters (younger than 16 years) must possess a valid refuge permit and be supervised by a permitted adult 21 years of age or older and must remain within sight and normal voice contact of the adult. For big game hunts, the adult may supervise only one youth. For small game hunts, the adult may supervise no more than two youths.

Prohibited Activities

Target practice is prohibited.

Wood gathering, camping, littering, and fires are prohibited.

Leashed dogs may be used for trailing injured game. Other use of dogs prohibited except for Piney Island Waterfowl hunt.

Unleashed dogs prohibited.

The use or possession of alcoholic beverages in refuge hunting areas is prohibited.

The placing of or hunting over bait is prohibited.

It is unlawful to insert a nail, spike or other metal object into any tree or to hunt from any tree in which a nail, spike or other metal object has been inserted.

Hunting from any paved or unpaved refuge road is prohibited.

Use of flagging tape and reflective tacks prohibited.

Painting or defacing plants or trees prohibited.

ATV's are prohibited on refuge hunts.

Hunting within 1000 feet of any residence or public area prohibited.

Cleaning of game within 1000 feet of any developed public recreation area is prohibited.

The refuge is open to daylight use only.

Quota Hunts Permits

The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) will be handling all quota hunt permits for St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Applications may be submitted at any license agent or tax collector or on-line at www.fl.fishandwildlife.com/start.php beginning 10 am (Eastern Time) May 1, 2012 through 11:59 (Eastern Time) June 5, 2012.

Panacea Unit Fall Archery

200 permits

November 6 - 10, 2012

Tuesday - Saturday

Species: deer and hogs, either sex and turkey (gobbler or bearded turkey). Area: Panacea Unit only.

Wakulla Unit Fall Archery

200 permits

October 9-13, 2012

Tuesday - Saturday

Species: deer and hogs, either sex and turkey (gobbler or bearded turkey). Area: Wakulla Unit only.

Archery Bag Limit: 2 deer per hunt; unlimited hogs; 1 turkey.

Wakulla Unit General Gun Hunt

100 permits

December 7 - 9, 2012

Friday - Sunday

Species: white-tailed deer (see bag limits below); hogs - either sex.

Area: Wakulla Unit only. Daily check-in/check-out required at the Wakulla Beach check station.

Panacea Unit General Gun Hunt

80 permits

December 14 - 16, 2012

Friday - Sunday

Species: white-tailed deer (see bag limits below); hogs - either sex.

Area: Panacea Unit only. Daily check-in/check-out required at the Otter Lake check station.

Mobility-impaired Person Gun Hunt

10 permits

December 8 - 10, 2012

Saturday - Monday

Species: white-tailed deer (see bag limits below); hogs, either sex.

Area: section of Panacea Unit west of Highway 372 (Shuckers Creek area).

General Gun Bag Limit: Two deer per hunt, either two antlerless deer or one antlerless deer and one antlered deer. Antlerless deer are defined per state regulations as deer with no antler or antlers less than 17". Antlered deer must have at least 3 points, 1 inch or greater in length on one antler to be harvested. Unlimited hogs.

Spring Golden

100 permits

April 9 - 13, 2013

Tuesday - Saturday hunting hours are 1/2 hour before sunrise until 1 pm ET.

Species: bearded turkeys only. Bag limit: one turkey per hunt.

Area: Panacea and Wakulla Units only.

New Quota Hunt Permits

Small Game and Hogs

December 26, 2012 - January 6, 2013

Species: gray squirrels, rabbits, muskrats, and hogs.

Area: both Panacea and Wakulla Units and Aucilla River Area.

Weapons: restricted to .22 calibre rimfire firearms or smaller shotguns with non-toxic shot, #4 birdshot or smaller, or muzzleloaders. Hunters may also use shotgun slugs, bowhunting, archery equipment or bows to take feral hogs. The use of other weapons is prohibited.

Permits on front of this brochure.

Piney Island Waterfowl Hunt / State Season

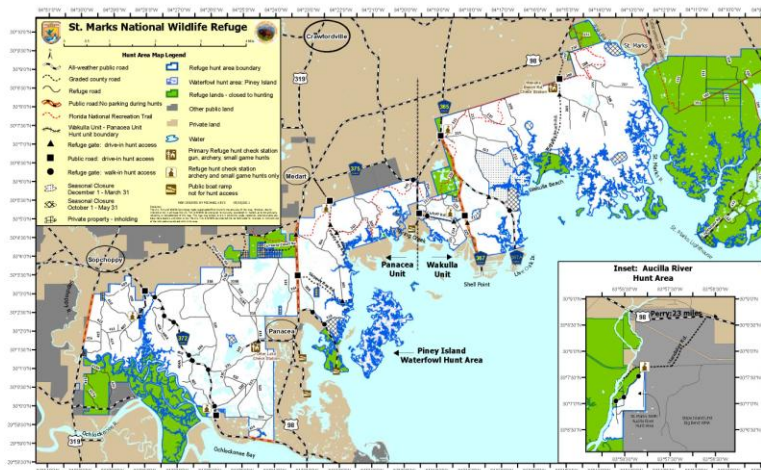
Species: ducks and coots.

Area: Piney Island only.

Weapons: non-toxic shot only. Hunting from blinds left in area for more than one day prohibited. Remove blinds daily.

Use of island plants for blinds prohibited.

Permits: No specific refuge permit required.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Hunting Regulations 2012-2013

This booklet must be signed to be valid for the December 2012 - January 2013 small game and hog hunt permit. It must be carried by the hunter during the hunt. Companions must also have this permit while in hunt area. Gates not open for pre-hunt scouting by vehicles.

Name _____ (Please print)

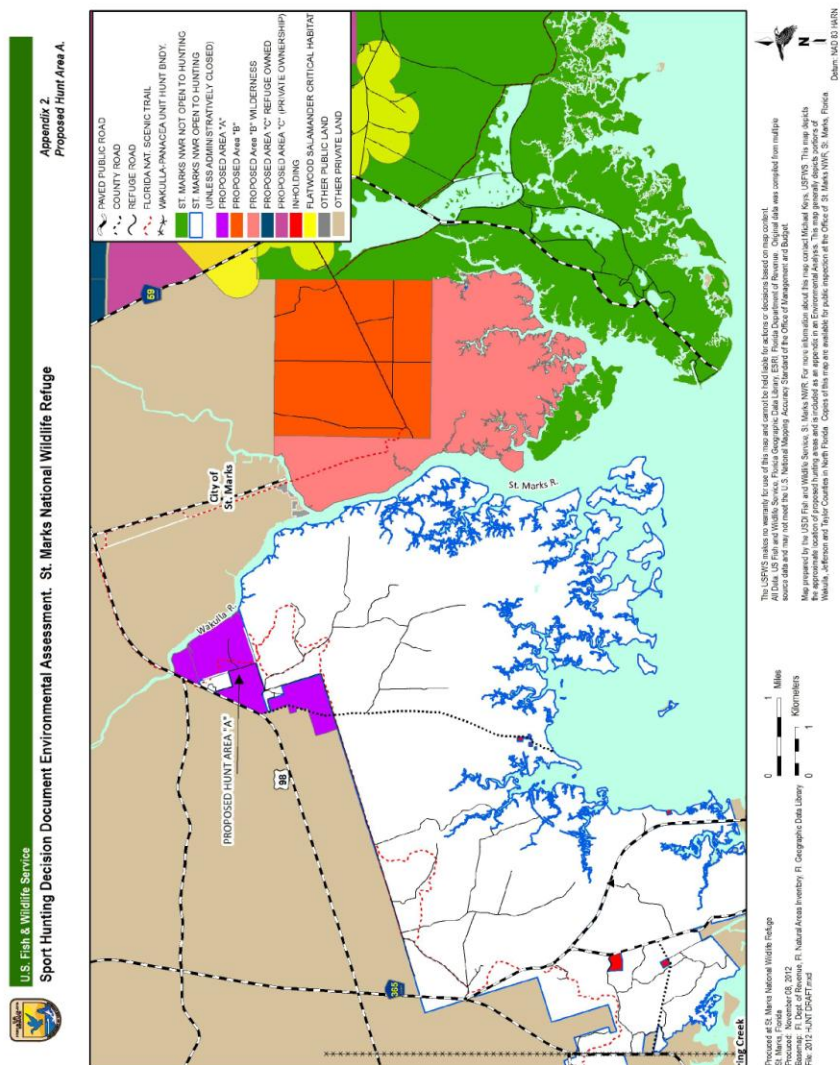
I have read and understand the refuge hunting regulations.

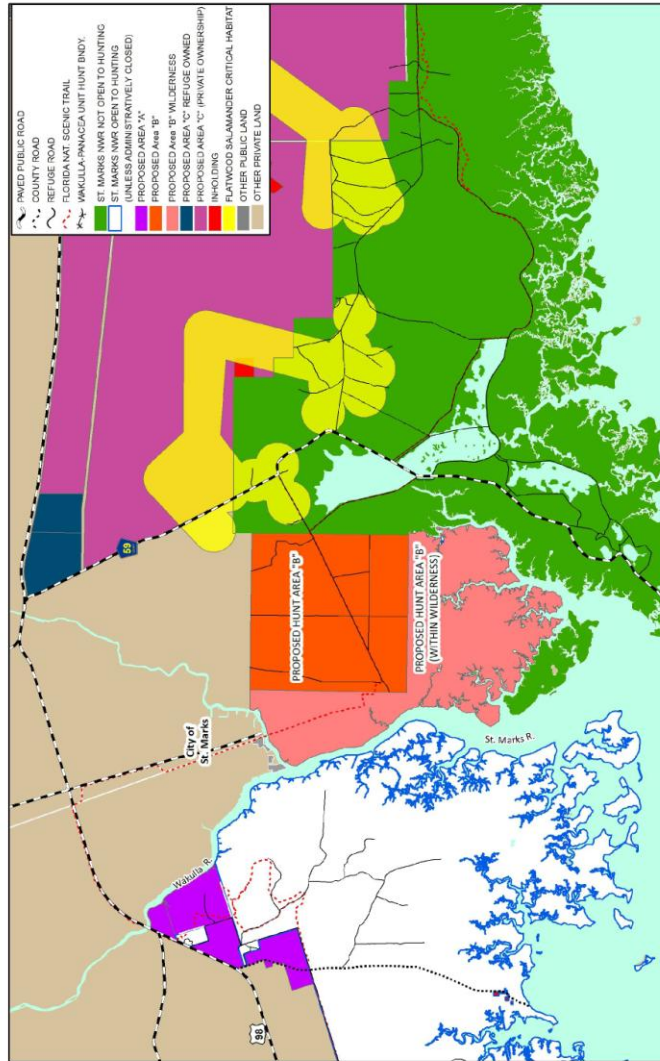
Signature _____ (Please print name and date/signature)

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 100
St. Marks, FL 32356
<http://www.fws.gov/stmarks/>
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Bureau of Land Management
July 2012



Appendix 2: Maps





Prepared at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge
 St. Marks, Florida
 Date: 10/10/2013
 Author: [Name]
 Editor: [Name]
 Reviewer: [Name]
 Approved: [Name]
 File: 2013-10-10-DDEA-Final

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Map prepared by the USFWS for the St. Marks WMS. For more information about the map contact Michael K. [Name], USFWS. This map includes the approximate location of proposed hunting areas and is included as an appendix in an Environmental Analysis. This map generated depicts portions of Wakulla, Jefferson and Taylor Counties in North Florida. Copies of this map are available for public inspection at the Office of St. Marks WMS, St. Marks, Florida. Contact: [Name] (904) 875-1400

